

In the Storm's Wake...

After a major storm, a community is instantly changed. Buildings may be damaged or destroyed, power lines down, and trees broken and torn. In the wake of this loss, neighborhoods and entire cities may experience a sense of devastation they have never known before.

"Because trees are such a large part of a city's visual landscape, damage to them from a severe storm can be a major shock to residents," says John Rosenow, president of The National Arbor Day Foundation, an organization that helps people plant and care for trees. "Seeing a favorite tree down or badly damaged in the front yard can be a traumatic experience-almost like losing an old friend."

But even in the wake of this shock, Rosenow says there are ways of coping with the loss. Among other things, he counsels patience in dealing with the storm's consequences.

"The experiences of many cities whose trees have suffered severe storm damage show us that the situation may not be as bad as it first appears," Rosenow says. "Trees are amazingly resilient and many recover with proper care and time. Despite the urge to do something immediately, people should try to be patient. As long as there isn't an immediate physical risk from a damaged tree, my advice is simple: if you're unsure about its condition, keep the tree for now."

"Of course, safety is the first major concern," Rosenow says. "Everyone should stay away from downed power lines and beware of broken tree limbs that may be ready to fall. Never use pruning equipment near utility lines." Downed utility lines should be reported to utility companies or 911 operators.

He adds that citizens' patience also allows city officials time to organize and respond properly to the situation. After a major storm, city officials, utility workers, and private tree care firms must focus first on dealing with hazards to life and property. After that, one of the city's major tasks is the removal of debris from the storm and the work of removing damaged branches and sometimes entire trees. Home owners should remember that street trees, usually those between the streets and sidewalks, are typically city-owned, and when that is the case, their care will be the city's responsibility.

By exercising a cool head, despite the devastation that accompanies a major storm, home owners are helping their community as well as working to preserve their own trees and property values, Rosenow notes.

Use a Qualified Arborist

"If a tree is large and the work is off the ground, or if a chainsaw is needed, it's best to contact a qualified arborist," Rosenow adds. "They have the equipment and know-how to safely remove broken or downed limbs and to help save and repair trees." Qualified tree experts can be found under the "Tree Service" section of most telephone directories.

"Whatever professional help you seek, make the decision wisely, as it will have long-term consequences for your trees," he says. "Locate a qualified tree care specialist and check references. Above all, don't be pressured by people with chainsaws knocking on your door and offering to remove or 'repair' your trees. Unfortunately, storms seem to produce such door-to-door callers, most of whom have no training and little interest in your trees beyond making a quick buck."

Storm Recovery Tips for Trees from The National Arbor Day Foundation

- Safety First - Beware of utility lines and hazardous overhanging limbs.
- Be Patient - If a tree does not represent a hazard, take the time necessary to be sure it gets proper care and make a final decision about it in a few weeks or months.
- Hire a Qualified Arborist - If a tree is large, requires high climbing, is leaning against wires, buildings or other trees, or if wires or structures are endangered, let a professional do the job.
- Take Heart - Trees are amazingly resilient, and the trees of other communities have recovered over time.